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CONTEMPORARY FRENCH FURNITURE.

M. VICTOR CHAMPIER has published his report on the modern French furniture exhibited in 1882 at the Technological Exhibition, organized by the Union Centrale des Arts Decoratifs at the Palais de l'Industrie. A brief analysis of this able report cannot fail to be interesting to our readers. Taste in the arrangement of our interiors and in the choice of our furniture, is a matter that tends to become more and more general. Formerly none but the rich could think of giving the measure of their refinement and intellectual delicacy of the splendor and exquisite perfection of their homes. Now-a-days the conditions are modified, and it is no longer necessary to be a millionaire in order to decorate one's home with tact and taste.

How did this need of luxury, comfort and elegance spring up in France since the beginning of the present century? It is curious to notice the influence that politics have had on French furniture. For more than two centuries, from the time of the Renaissance to the time of the First Empire, it was held in respect by royal authority and by the prestige of a luxurious and cultivated court. Then, when the court disappeared, and its guide and regulator was gone, French furniture began to beat about the bush, seeking a leader, seeking a criterion of new forms, a regulator of taste, and finding only caprices and silly whims, and the dull esthetic indifference of a society whose education in matters of taste was simply *nil*. Furniture, which had its 1793, which had been massacred, crushed in the chateau, driven away from Versailles, obliged to emigrate like the nobles of the old régime, had also to suffer from the disastrous wars of the Empire. The cabinet-makers had to go and fight, or at any rate to utilize their skill in making musket butt ends, and when the Restoration arrived, they had forgotten how to compose and carve a piece of furniture. The chain of artistic tradition was broken, and furniture was made to pass through a strange series of evolutions, changing its forms, style and usage, following in the wake of literature, and becoming romantic, pseudo-Gothic, Renaissance and what not, until it arrived at the Eclecticism of the present day. And in the midst of all this disorder and confusion there is an order and unity; we find furniture the slave of those who create it, and as if it were governed by an inexorable law, it has reflected exactly the society of the present age, with all its qualities and defects, its ignorance or its frivolity, its passions, its intellectual uneasiness, its vanity, its love of show and change.

The renaissance of the furniture industry in France dates from the taste for *bibels* and antiquities, that came in with the literature of Victor Hugo and the Romanticists, between 1834 and 1844. In consequence of this movement the curiosity dealers began to hunt up all the old panels, old

carvings and old pieces of furniture that they could find, and then the manufacturers took to making imitations of old furniture under the control of archæologists and amateurs. This movement formed an admirable set of artists and workmen, who had a decided and beneficial influence on French furniture.

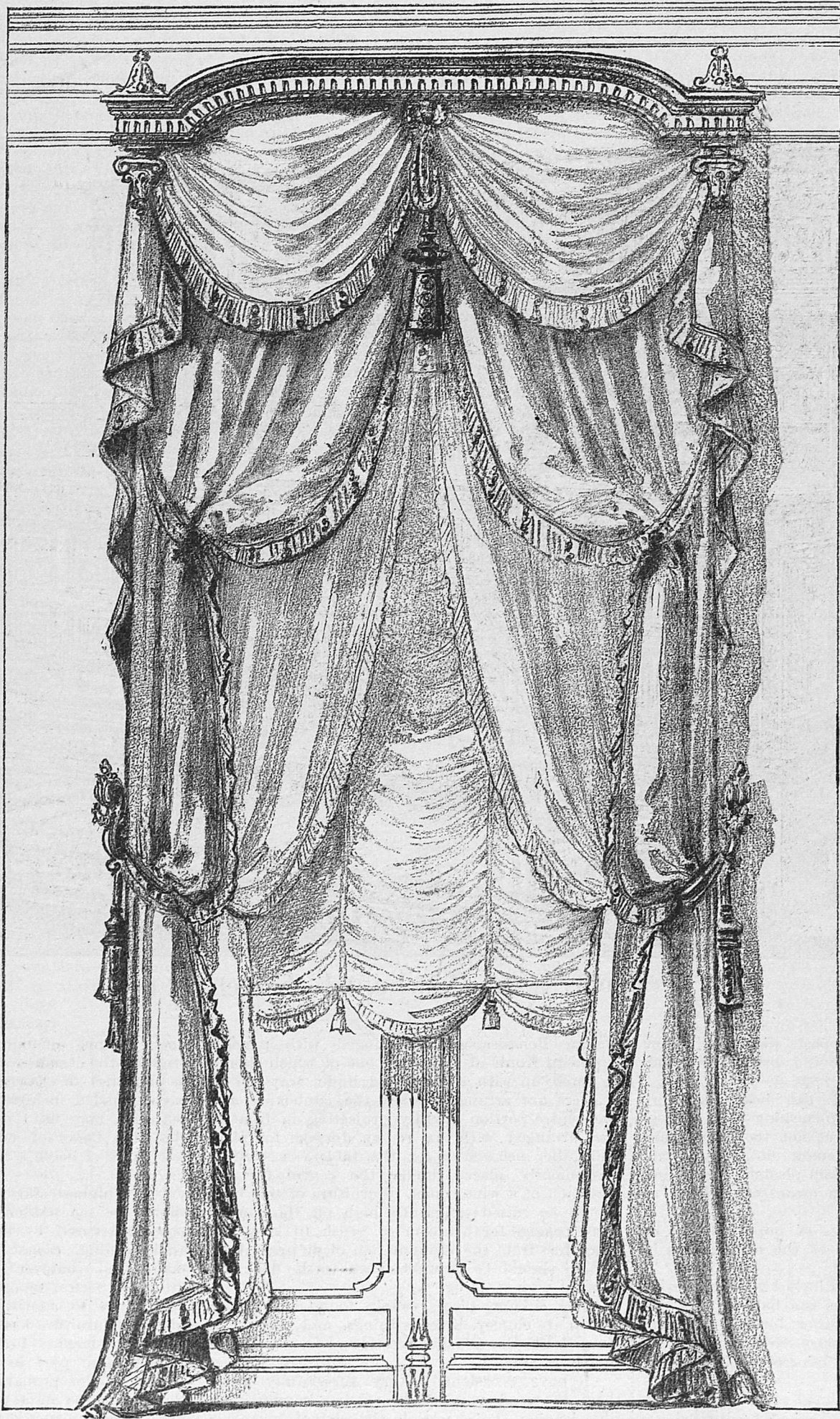
The artist who played the preponderating rôle during this period was Liénard (1810-70), who for more than thirty years, from 1835 onwards, was the favorite designer for all the Parisian goldsmiths, cabinet-makers, sculptors, *brouziers*, architects, iron-workers, etc. Liénard had studied sculpture and architecture; he had directed the restoration of the châteaux of Amboise, Versailles and Blois; he had designed the sculptures of the Seine façade of the Louvre. After these débuts Liénard was prepared for everything, and no style was unfamiliar to him. Liénard's favorite source of inspiration was the Renaissance, whose ornaments he ingeniously adapted to the various industries for which he designed. In this century Liénard has been the great imitator, and his models are still the chief stand-by of the manufacturers of the Faubourg Saint Antoine. Thanks

to the influence of this designer, wood-carving was reinstated in France, and at the Industrial Exhibition of 1849 the luxury and expensiveness of the furniture displayed was so great, that the jury expressed alarm and almost disapproval. The jury was astonished that a manufacturer should run the risk of making a piece of furniture priced at \$1,000. It is curious to notice that it was the manufacturers who appear to have incited the public towards the taste for rich furniture, without waiting until the need of luxury had become developed.

As to the Exhibition of 1851, the French triumph in England started the art movement there, that has since attained such remarkable development, while at the same time they made acquaintance with new machinery for wood-work, such as no Frenchman had ever dreamed of. This machinery was gradually introduced into France, and is now universally employed with a mixture of good and bad results, a certain loss of individuality in the furniture on the one hand, and on the other an unparalleled perfection of detail.

In conclusion, M. Champier remarks three causes that act on the evolution of the forms of furniture. Furniture is the servant of our needs, and is therefore adapted to the common habits of a nation or of a society, leaving of course a certain part of liberty to the special temperament and taste of individuals. In an age that is not subjected to an absolute discipline, individuality finds its expression everywhere; the individual marks his action on everything, and particularly on furniture. The second cause is fashion, which also has its laws. It is fashion that has ordained the successive imitations of the styles of the Renaissance, the Gothic and the Bourbon periods. The third cause is industry, which, with the aid of science, tends to make life easier, by supplying all our wants cheaply, which realizes evident economical progress, which puts within the reach of all an appearance of luxury and a certain comfort, but which at the same time simplifies the fabrication, detaches the consumer from the production and from original work, trivialises forms, and habituates people to desire less objects of pure and true taste than objects that make the greatest effect.

Thus furniture is subjected, like everything else, to a sort of incessant pulling and distraction in all directions. The two first causes alleged are permanent; they have existed and always will exist. The third cause is modern, and at the present moment the most influential. Does this suffice to support the pretension of those who say the sentiment of taste is dried up in France, and that furniture found its most complete expression under Louis XIV. and Louis XV., and that we are henceforward condemned to live on souvenirs? M. Champier does not accept this conclusion; on the contrary, he looks forward to a new departure in furniture, more vigorous and fertile than ever.



SUGGESTION FOR WINDOW DECORATION.